

Complaints and compliments: The importance of good and regular feedback with volunteers

Overview

- [Introduction](#)
- [Creating a culture of feedback](#)
- [Why gather and give positive feedback and compliments](#)
- [Developing feedback opportunities with volunteers](#)
- [Gathering feedback during one-to-one supervision](#)
- [Gathering feedback during group supervision](#)
- [Gathering feedback from staff and service users](#)
- [Approaches to avoid](#)
- [When a complaint is made](#)
- [Complaints made by volunteers](#)
- [Complaints made about volunteers](#)
- [Things to consider](#)
- [Further information](#)

Introduction

Whether you're new to formalising your approach to volunteer feedback and complaints, or looking to improve your current system, this information will help you implement practices that ensure support, deal with issues swiftly and sensitively, and prepare for scenarios involving both volunteer-raised concerns and concerns raised about volunteers.

It would be valuable to compile an organisational statement outlining your approach to feedback, compliments and complaints, which is echoed within the organisations Volunteering Policy. The whole organisation would benefit from understanding and applying the approach.

Contact your local volunteer centre

If you feel that you would like some support discussing the elements in this information sheet you can contact your local Volunteer Centre

Creating a culture of feedback



To help maintain a connected volunteer base and run a welcoming, supportive, and safe organisation, developing a culture of clear regular communication and feedback allows you to show your gratitude to volunteers and the wider team about their specific impact, and to deal with concerns at the earliest opportunity. A culture of feedback gets the balance right in pointing out the positives while addressing areas for improvement and concerns. This culture is purposeful, transparent, and respectful, with an expectation that any issues are addressed by the organisation swiftly. Effective communication may prevent the need for instigating your organisation's complaints procedure.

Why gather and give positive feedback and compliments

Positive feedback is a powerful way to motivate volunteers. Emphasising its use within your induction training and volunteer policy reinforces how your organisation values the contribution of volunteers and builds a sense of belonging. Positive feedback is just as important as feedback to address concerns. Organisations that actively encourage and capture compliments from staff, service users, and fellow volunteers create simple, accessible ways for people to highlight their positive experiences with volunteers. Sharing this feedback directly with volunteers, either individually or publicly, helps them feel appreciated.

Recognition can take many forms, from thank-you cards and certificates to social media posts or mentions in newsletters, reports, and team meetings. To ensure compliments are meaningful, they should be specific, could be linked to organisational values, and will highlight the impact the volunteer has made. Keeping a record of compliments not only supports volunteer satisfaction but also contributes valuable material for references, reporting, funding applications, and celebration events.

Developing feedback opportunities with volunteers

Getting to know volunteers well enables you to fully understand their needs and to recognise difficulties early. Any opportunity to say "hi" pays dividends. Opportunities to informally chat by phone, touch base by email, have a cuppa, gather views with surveys or at Volunteers' forum meetings where volunteers can share their views, provide opportunities to understand each other better. Trust is developed when time is invested in "getting to know" opportunities and concerns are visible earlier.

A common practice in volunteer management is the use of supervision, this term is used to describe a ongoing process of regular two-way conversations between volunteers and those that manage them to ensure volunteers are guided, supported and held accountable.

Gathering feedback during one-to-one supervision



Preferably, you will meet with volunteers regularly face-to-face in a comfortable environment to chat. You may also use telephone or digital means to chat one-to-one with volunteers as practicalities dictate. Face-to-face meetings allow you to communicate more openly, relax and understand each other more fully.

It is important that this process becomes familiar, is described at application, induction, within the volunteer handbook and in your volunteer policy. Supervision will ideally be regular, follow an expected format and be a valuable experience where both parties feed back.

Use questions that open your communication about the connection between the volunteer and the wider team and service users. Set aside time in each supervision within the session for positive and specific feedback. Encourage volunteers to continue and develop. Use this process to discuss any concerns, or if supervision is not planned for a while, contact as soon as possible as to start understanding and identifying issues for problem-solving.

Make good supervision records and store key elements from dialogues showing views, progress, and any raised issues, and as a record to which you may return. You may wish to share a summary of the supervision with the volunteer. Anonymised quotes from this conversation can also be useful for social media, volunteer recruitment, funding, and organisational reports.

Gathering feedback during group supervision

Group supervision (face to face or online) as well as one-to-one supervision can add to the ways of gaining feedback from the volunteer base. You could discuss team successes, impact, and cover matters that affect everyone. You can find ways of improving the support offered to volunteers and gain helpful suggestions for overall project improvements.

Record who attends and their viewpoints. Next time you hold such a gathering, feed back on suggestions and views given previously to show any changes or responses. Taking action and informing the volunteers

will encourage more honest feedback.

Gathering feedback from staff and service users

It is important in staff supervision sessions, to provide time to discuss volunteer successes and issues arising with volunteers. Discussions could include volunteers' impact and give time for finding solutions to any concerns. Develop opportunities for gathering feedback from service users to show the positive impact of volunteers, and to discover any issues arising to enable your organisation to address them. Many suggestions for gathering feedback already given can be applied to staff and service users.

Approaches to avoid

Be careful not to develop volunteer agreements that become contractual to avoid future complaints or to underpin a complaints process.

It is important not to develop disciplinary procedures for dealing with complaints about volunteers. Do not develop policies that set out formal procedures for dealing with breaches, warnings, and stages. Any disciplinary procedure your organisation uses for dealing with its staff is not appropriate when dealing with volunteers. Be careful not to develop volunteer agreements that become contractual to avoid future complaints or to underpin a complaints process. It is better to ensure your induction training, information provided to volunteers and support underlines why certain behaviour is anticipated, what helps your organisation remain safe and welcoming, and what actions cannot be accepted and why.

When a complaint is made

All concerns or complaints, regardless of whether they are raised by a volunteer or about a volunteer, must be dealt with seriously, sensitively, and swiftly. Prompt action and addressing issues at the earliest opportunity demonstrate respect for all parties. In every instance, the Volunteer Manager should ensure full and clear communication of the relevant policy and process to the volunteer involved, and support should be offered throughout the process. It is advisable for Volunteer Managers to consult with other staff for assistance in handling complex issues. Crucially, all concerns or complaints must be recorded for accountability and to facilitate a necessary post-incident review and learning process to identify required changes in practice.

Complaints made by volunteers



When a volunteer raises concerns, the priority is to demonstrate the organisation's **duty of care** and that it takes their experience seriously.

- **Explore solutions:** The immediate focus, if appropriate and with the volunteer's consent, is to explore and implement solutions. These may include mediation, providing additional resources, offering extra support for the volunteer, or arranging specific training for a team member involved.
- **When a complaint is severe or unresolved:** If the concern is severe or unresolved through informal means, the organisation's formal complaints policy should be instigated. This process must be fully explained to the volunteer.
- **Risk of inaction:** Failure to respond effectively to these concerns increases the risk of volunteers leaving and potentially compromises safety or service delivery.

Complaints made about volunteers

To reduce instances of complaints about volunteers, volunteers would benefit from being fully informed (via volunteer induction, information circulated to them and that they understand such as role descriptions, and volunteer handbook, ongoing training and support) of what is expected from them and what cannot be accepted.

The knowledge and understanding of a volunteer by their Volunteer Manager and their experience may provide useful background information if a complaint is raised.

Complaints about volunteers do not in all cases need to result in them leaving. There are conversations to be had about what has happened, supported by a culture of open communication, which can consider what happens next.

Your organisation would benefit from having a '*Letting Volunteers Go*' policy which shapes the process for deciding whether a volunteer should be asked to leave the organisation. To ensure volunteers are well informed about this process, you could introduce it during the volunteer induction, have it available as part of a volunteer handbook and fully explained to the volunteer if you are applying the policy. It would be valuable to provide support to the volunteer during this process.

You may decide together that provision of extra support, training, a different role, or some time away will help.

A Letting Volunteers Go process acts as a great way of showing what avenues should be and have been explored. In some cases, it may be necessary for the volunteer to conclude their involvement due to the issue at hand. Dealing with this is different to staff disciplinary policies.

Things to consider:

- A clear communication culture echoes the good practice recognised within [The Code of Practice for Involving Volunteers](#) and [Investing in Volunteers](#), enhancing the volunteer experience and strengthening your organisation's reputation.
- Avoid using language which changes the volunteer relationship with your organisation into one that could be deemed contractual. Find out more by reading [Volunteers and the law](#)
- Developing a Volunteer Voices forum can give volunteers a platform to be heard and provide another opportunity for volunteer views to be gathered by your organisation.

Further information

Find out more about 'Letting Volunteers Go' on this page – [Managing Volunteer Exits](#)